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ABSTRACT

For the new two-year college instructor, gaining information that specifically addresses his/her problems and concerns, and establishing the network to generate the flow of quality information can be a problem. How the instructor deals with this problem is a function of his/her stage of growth. In the neophyte stage, the new faculty member is confronted with information overload and a tremendous rate and complexity of communication. To reduce anxiety and increase competency, the neophyte opens a network that provides as much information as possible. The transitional stage is characterized by a search for concise, concrete, and immediately applicable information and by the formulation and sharing of a philosophy of teaching. The transitional faculty member needs to discuss his/her philosophy and practices with a mentor in order to critique and evaluate the information gained during the neophyte stage. The final stage is the competent stage, in which the mentor's role is diminished and the instructor takes his/her place in the information network of others. The new community college instructor should possess certain qualities and attitudes, including: (1) an interest in and respect for the individual; (2) demonstrated sensitivity and objectivity; (3) an awareness of students' individuality and the flexibility to present a concept in a variety of modes; (4) an understanding of the mission of the college; and (5) an awareness of necessary instructional strategies and methods.
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TEACHING NEW DOGS OLD TRICKS

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Paper presented at the Convention of the Speech Association

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TEACHING NEW DOGS OLD TRICKS
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A teaching division, composed of two members at a university medical school, was funded for two additional faculty. Very meticulously the two stalwarts who were the screening committee developed a series of questions, the answers to which would get them the best applicants. The appointments were established, the questions asked and one applicant was of the quality they desired. In searching for the second person to complete the faculty a single question was asked, "Do you play bridge?"

We have come some distance from this rudimentary, though fanciful, mode of hiring personnel. Each established institution has strong criteria for hiring, bounded by affirmative action guidelines. Additionally, each teaching institution knows the personality and the atmosphere at the school and attempts to fill the vacant positions with someone who will complement, supplement and further the institutional image. However, after the hiring process has occurred, the educating of the new faculty member to the teaching about, and teaching the knowledge about the institution, is necessary for the integration process to be

complete. Therefore, how to teach new dogs old tricks, and how to know which old tricks to teach, all within the framework of the community college system, is the purpose of this presentation.

We have all been taught to respect the axiom that states the measure of a wise person is not that he or she has all the answers, rather that he or she knows where to get the answers. Today our concern with information is not how much information is available, but what is the quality of the available information. As a society we have moved beyond the awestruck feeling of power that our information systems have given us. How does one respond to the available information so as to manage it and make it easier to discern quality information that has use and value? An Occam's razor is what is required and needed. As this Medieval saint accounted: "Plurality is not to be posited without necessity" (Hyman and Walsh, 1978).

As a new instructor in a community college, once again this troublesome predicament of gaining quality information presents itself. Specifically, what information does a new faculty member to any community college need to be effective, realistic and patient? Moreover, how does this new faculty member

network to promote the generation and flow of quality information--information that specifically answers and addresses the problems and special concerns of the new faculty member?

The direction needed to answer these questions is one of process and dialogue; process, recognizing the stages of growth the new instructor experiences, and dialogue, sharing this growth with a mentor. This section of the essay proposes that how one requests and gains quality information is a function of the stage the instructor is in, whether it be the neophyte stage, the transitional stage or the stage of growing competence. A resulting corollary of this premise is that how the faculty member responds to and functions within these stages, can be enhanced, facilitated, and examined through interaction and dialogue with a mentor.

At the start, the new faculty member is confronted with information overload. This is a central characteristic of the neophyte stage, and can occur in both the formal and informal communication channels. The attending community college will orient the new faculty member to the policies and procedures of the college. Orientation meetings attempt to bring the new faculty

member "up to speed" as soon as possible. Informally, the new faculty member has to gain information about student demographics, information about the department's known and hidden agendas, and information on how to correctly fill out a request form in triplicate. The neophyte state is marked by this confusing stage of information overload.

The rate and complexity of communication on the new faculty member at this stage is tremendous. Combine this with frustration and lack of experience and confidence of an instructor at the community college, and an apparent paradox arises. In an effort to reduce anxiety and increase competency, the neophyte opens a network that will provide as much information as is possible. Sharing perceptions with other members of the department, confronting instructors from other departments and seeking administrative assistance whenever applicable, are all maneuvers to get as much information into his or her awareness. The paradox is that all of this information leads to generalizations, watered-down responses with little application for the particular movement. This information load predicament for the neophyte appears as a fine example of an apparent paradox of the excluded middle: either there is not enough quality

information available, or there is an excessive amount of generalized information. With this awareness, the neophyte faculty member begins the movement from the stage of neophyte to that of being in transition.⁹¹ The transitional stage, which exists between the stages of neophyte and competency is recognized primarily by the faculty member's search for quality information that is concrete, concise and immediately applicable. The new faculty member is now set to the task of networking his or her information, as opposed to the gathering of any information. This stage is also marked by the formulation of a philosophy of instruction and sharing this philosophy in order to test its validity. The new faculty member in this stage needs to dialogue his or her philosophies and practices with a mentor in order to challenge, critique and evaluate the information gained during the neophyte stage. Cohen and Brawer (1972) emphasize this need to share and dialogue when they conclude, "in our opinion, the instructor who can articulate his real intentions is well on the way to understanding himself and his profession. His specific learning objectives for his students thus enhance his own personal and professional maturity."

Mentoring is not giving answers to the new instructor's problems: it is engaging in dialogue and sharing. The mentor is central to the networking of the new faculty member. This is an important point of separation between the two stages of neophyte and competency. When the new faculty member is confident in his or her network, the need for the mentor is changed and reduced. The mentor is the "occam razor" for the transitional stage. Neophyte information is changed by the mentor's razor, resulting in an approach, a disposition, and a higher level of confidence, so that the new instructor can become comfortable and competent.

The final stage of growth for the new instructor is the competent stage. It is in the competent stage that the mentor's role is diminished and the new faculty member's status of "new" is removed. The "new" is removed when the faculty member begins to act and do his or her own instructional approach without the assistance of the mentor. In addition, another aspect of this status change is when other instructors, who are at this stage, approach the instructor as a part of their quality information network. Other faculty members are comfortable and satisfied with the maturing instructor and thus

seek to dialogue and grow through the inclusion of this instructor within their personal networking. The competent instructor is welcomed as a new faculty member ^{who is} a colleague, a member of that community college's academic community.

The process of growth of a new instructor has been described in the preceeding section. These stages of development have no definite time constraints, and are individually paced. The stages flow in a direction and can be identified by the kinds of questions asked by the new instructor. It is a leap of faith that the seasoned instructor takes when he or she interviews and hires the new instructor, hoping that his or her idealism and philosophy can be translated into practice, methods and techniques. The following section speaks of the qualities, attitudes and behaviors needed by a community college instructor as postulated by a seasoned instructor.

An ideal community college teacher should have the qualities similar to the boy scout creed. Loyalty, honesty, genuineness, humility, etc., are admirable, yet are difficult to translate into behaviors. The following criteria are desirable in hiring a new teacher.

The most important quality the new teacher possesses is interest in and respect for the individual, and his or her aspirations and potentials. This quality is important for the students who will have difficulty at expression, if respect for their position is not present. It is necessary that the new instructor know that he or she may represent a model, but the ultimate choice for a model should be made by the student and not imposed by the teacher. This needed quality of interest in, and respect for the individual, can be assessed from interaction in the initial interview. Pomposity, an overbearing demeanor, choice of language composed of terms which are dogmatic and absolute are not indicative of a potential community college instructor.

Tangential to the above quality is the demonstrated personality characteristics of sensitivity and objectivity. The new instructor fresh out of graduate school, whose teaching assignments have been limited to his or her experience as a graduate teaching assistant, has no conception of the kinds of students he or she will meet in the community classroom. In a beginning speech communication class it is not uncommon to have a student who cannot read sitting next to a student who will progress until he or she will graduate from

a four-year college as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. It is relatively common to have four different native languages represented in a single classroom of twenty-five students. When a class member chides a fellow classmate with, "Why, I'm old enough to be your grandmother!", she isn't joking. Given this wide range of talents and backgrounds, the new instructor has to walk the narrow ridge between being able to empathize and be objective enough to deal with the students' limitations.

Being sensitive to the students and aware of each one's individuality is especially important in the community college. A good portion of the students have no conception of how to think, how to express themselves, how to be logical, how to apply what is printed in their text or how they communicate in the larger world. A community college teacher can not perceive him or herself as Mr. Chips. A qualified community college instructor has the flexibility and the resources to thoroughly present a concept in many different modes, so that the most ill-prepared student can comprehend it, while at the same time, not talking down to other more competent students in the class. The community college instructor must demonstrate flexibility in all areas of his or

her employ. He or she must believe the unmotivated student can and will learn. The instructor must be willing to make changes to adapt to many diverse learning modes, so that all the students in his or her class have access to the material presented.

A further facet of the new instructor that is needed in the community college is an understanding of the mission of the college. Community colleges are more than holding places for young adults who have no direction. Nor are community colleges post-high school. Community colleges have a purpose in the educational design. They are institutions which respond to the community's needs, and educate according to those needs: by providing the first two years of a college education; by conducting workshops, seminars and short courses for the community; by providing out-reach programs in the community; by offering training in the trades; by being an educational home for the community. Given this multipurposed agenda, the community college may not be an apt situation for some kinds of teachers. It is not a haven for the professional who is waiting for a position at a research oriented university. Nor is it a likely place for the teacher who loves to pontificate before bright, hungry, young

students. The community college needs instructors who enjoy teaching, and who welcome the chance to test his or her sensitivities and abilities with students who are being given a second chance.

Another quality needed by the community college instructor is an awareness of necessary strategies. The teacher must be well organized. Handouts, transparencies, games, exercises must be a part of his or her repertoire. These must be directly related to that which is being taught, concrete enough so that all students can comprehend their purpose, and designed and presented so that students can respond so as to increase their understanding. The community college instructor must be especially succinct in his or her presentations and present examples that concrete, appropriate and relevant. The organization the instructor uses does not rely heavily on the text, for the instructor realizes many of the students are ear-bound. Instructions given by this ideal community college instructor are clear and direct. A behavior to assess this quality in the potential instructor is the quality of his or her communication in the initial interview. Being clear in his or her responses, being expansive without having that expansiveness loaded with jargon, using

appropriate listening responses are some of the behaviors which will demonstrate the organization the potential instructor possesses.

And finally, the most important quality can be summed up in the words of Pablo Casals, "Above all else, do not be afraid to be human." In all teaching endeavors at the community college, a teacher must recognize the human community he or she is a part of when in the classroom. To realize that that which seems so basic to the instructor is a muddle to some students is a lesson in humility and a challenge to his or her innovativeness as a teacher. One aspect of being human is a sense of humor, which is sorely needed by the community college teacher. The ability to laugh to oneself is a good antidote after reading a student's paper which had "come see, come saw" on it, written exactly that way. Laughter was the only recourse after spying a woman in the front row listening to my lecture while picking her nose, and feasting on the product of her search.

This paper has been a joint effort of formulating questions, defining needs and integrating both. Mark, a new instructor, generalized from the development of his process of understanding his mission as a member of a community college faculty. Judy stated specific qualities she looks for when

hiring and then initiating the new faculty member to the philosophy of the community college. Living through this process, and then writing about it as we have done, has evolved into a mutuality, an equality and has enriched our dialogue.

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